

REMARKS

Claims 25 and 30 have been amended in order to more particularly point, out and distinctly claim the subject matter to which the applicants regard as their invention.

Claims 25 - 33 remain in this application. Claims 1 - 24 have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer.

In the final Action of the parent case, the following rejections are set forth as follows:

- (1) claims 25, 26, 28 and 29 stand rejected under 35 USC 103 based on Girardello; and
- (2) claims 27 and 30 - 33 stand rejected under 35 USC 103 based on Girardello in view of the Japanese Patent Publication No. 1-272719.

The applicants respectfully request reconsideration of these rejections.

It is respectfully submitted that in independent claim 25, the following structural arrangement has been highlighted: the claimed soft layer has a core region and intermediate regions, wherein one of the intermediate regions is between the core region and a respective one of the quench hardened layers. Further in claim 25, the claimed core region being is composed of one or more structures selected from the group consisting of ferrite, pearlite, bainite and martensite.

In the applicants' claimed invention, as now set forth in claim 30, the claimed soft layer has a core region and intermediate regions, wherein one of the intermediate regions is between the core region and a respective one of the quench hardened layers. As further recited in claim 30, the claimed core region is composed of one or more structures selected from the group consisting of ferrite, pearlite, bainite and martensite.

The applicants respectfully submit herewith sketches labeled Figures 11 - 13. Figure 11 is a pattern diagram showing the microstructure of Girardello's products (see, Girardello's Figure 8), while Figures 12 and 13 are pattern diagrams showing the microstructure of the products corresponding to claims 25 and 30, respectively.

Each of independent claims 25 and 30 has been amended in order to: (1) specifically define the structural relationship of the claimed core region, and (2) specifically recite that such claimed core region is composed of one or more structures selected from the group consisting of ferrite, pearlite, bainite and martensite.

As to the prior art, the primary reference of Girardello similarly has a core region, but as shown in the attached Figure 11 (Girardello's Figure 8), Girardello's core region is composed solely of sorbite.

Accordingly, a person of ordinary skill in the art would not have found the applicants' claimed invention, as now set forth in independent claim 25 (and claims 26 - 29 which depend from claim 25), and independent claim 30 (and claims 31 - 33 which depend from claim 30), obvious under 35 USC 103 based on Girardello, singly or in combination with the Japanese Patent Publication No. 1-272719.

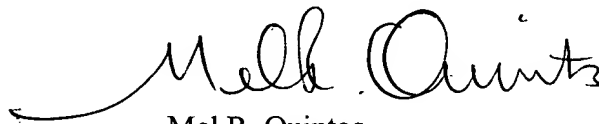
In view of the above, the withdrawal of the outstanding obviousness rejections under 35 USC 103 based on Girardello, singly or in view of the Japanese Patent Publication No. 1-272719, as set forth in the Office Action dated March 26, 2003, is in order, and is therefore respectfully solicited.

The above amendments are believed to place the claims in proper condition for examination. Early and favorable action is awaited.

In the event that any fees are due in connection with this paper, please charge our Deposit
Account No. 01-2340.

Respectfully submitted,

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Enclosure: FIGS. 11 - 13